

Week 3-4: Reference and information services personnel. Techniques of literature searching.

Reference and Information Services Personnel

The role of the reference librarian has been defined by the patrons' need for human mediation. Reference librarians apply critical-thinking skills, emotional intelligence, teaching ability, and question analysis to connect the users with appropriate resources.

For the reference librarians to carry out these new and challenging roles, they will stay in advance of need, believe in themselves and what they can offer, not take their existence for granted, develop themselves, learn from each other, seize the opportunities, lift up their heads, get out more and engage, be confident and claim the future.

The reference librarian needs to understand the institution and its service issues; building and advertising his or her unique knowledge of research, sources, and users; being aware of literature and trends; communicating with other librarians and visiting other libraries; and creating collaborative working relationships with other library and campus unit.

The specific expectation of the reference and information services personnel are;

- 1. Information Provider:** Direct provision of answers or specific data to user queries (e.g., finding a fact or a statistic).
- 2. Instructional Consultant:** Teaching users how to find information themselves, including database searching, evaluating sources, and using technology (Information Literacy Instruction).
- 3. Resource Navigator/Guide:** Guiding users to appropriate resources, both physical (books, journals) and digital (databases, websites, subject guides).
- 4. Technology Integrator:** Assisting users with library technologies, digital resources, and online services (e.g., e-books, citation tools, institutional repositories).
- 5. Collection Developer:** Providing feedback to guide the selection of materials (especial

ly reference and digital resources) based on observed user needs and gaps.

6. Marketing/Outreach: Promoting reference services, information literacy programs, and new resources to the user community.

7. Reference Sources: Deep familiarity with core reference tools (dictionaries, encyclopedias, bibliographies, indexes, handbooks) across formats (print and digital).

8. Information Organization: Understanding of cataloging, classification systems (Dewey Decimal, Library of Congress), and controlled vocabularies to efficiently retrieve information.

9. Database Searching: Mastery of Boolean logic (\$AND\$, \$OR\$, \$NOT\$), truncation, controlled vocabularies, and advanced search features across diverse proprietary databases.

10. Web Searching: Proficiency in using advanced search operators and evaluating the quality, authority, and currency of web resources.

11. Technology Fluency: Skill in using the library's Integrated Library System (ILS), virtual reference software, and emerging technologies (e.g., AI tools, discovery layers).

12. The Reference Interview: The skill of effectively communicating with users to clarify their true information need, which is often done through careful questioning, active listening, and rapport building.

13. Patience and Empathy: Ability to assist users of all knowledge levels without judgment.

14. Impartiality: Providing assistance fairly to all users, regardless of their background, beliefs, or the nature of their inquiry.

15. Referral: Knowing when a question is outside the scope of the library and effectively referring the user to appropriate internal (e.g., specialized archives) or external (e.g., com

munity services) resources.

16. Reference Service delivery channels- The reference librarian should be able to deliver reference service through any channels such as

- ✓ **In-Person (Traditional):** At the physical Reference Desk.
- ✓ **Virtual Reference:**
 - **Chat:** Real-time text interaction (e.g., LibChat, Ask-a-Librarian services).
 - **Email:** Responses to non-immediate inquiries.
 - **Video Conferencing:** Used for complex consultations or detailed instruction sessions.
- **Telephone:** Traditional mode for quick, factual questions.
- **Asynchronous:** Providing self-help via Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), online Subject Guides, and video tutorials.

17. **Negotiation/Questioning:** The reference librarian should be able to ask open and closed-ended questions to clarify the context, scope, and intended use of the information. (e.g., "What will you use this information for?" "How much information do you need?")

18. **Search Strategy Formulation:** Developing a search plan based on the clarified need.

19. **Search and Presentation:** Executing the search and presenting the results to the user.

20. **Follow-up/Verification:** Confirming that the provided information meets the user's original need and offering further assistance ("Does this answer your question completely?").

The new roles of the reference librarian in the 21st century include;

i. Cultural role

ii. Teaching role

iii. Providing access to information

iv. Space provision

v. Act as information advocates

vi. Advisory role

vii. Information organisation and retrieval

viii. Knowledge of digital management, and information mining.